

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1.9
18755
WHAT CITY FAMILIES ARE EATING

☆ FEB 28 1939
U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman and Dr. Hazel K. Stiebeling, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, February 23, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

--ooOoo--

JOHN BAKER:

And now as usual on Thursdays first comes the report of what's new in the Bureau of Home Economics. And as usual Ruth Van Deman is here to start the ball rolling.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

But you're going to keep it going.

BAKER:

Am I?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, anybody who goes off the deep end on the diet question, the way you did a few minutes ago with Hazel Stiebeling here.

BAKER:

It isn't often I get a chance to talk to one of the world's leading food economists---

VAN DEMAN:

That's why I asked her to join us today---so she could tell us about her latest study on what city families are eating and how their diets measure up by nutrition standards.

BAKER:

Dr. Stiebeling, I gather you didn't find the picture any too rosy.

HAZEL STIEBELING:

There's certainly plenty of room for improvement. And in many cases without spending any more money.

BAKER:

No more money? Well, that's contrary to what we often hear. Was it 4000 food records from families you said you'd analyzed?

STIEBELING:

Yes, through a cooperative arrangement, the Bureau of Labor Statistics gave us the chance to study their records. They're for the food bought in a week by city families from coast to coast. That is, families not on relief. Some of them belong to the skilled trades. Others are unskilled. And some are in clerical jobs.

BAKER:

A good mixture of white collars and blue collars.

(over)

STIEBELING:

That's right. But no professional people or ones in the higher income brackets. Most of the records we studied were from families spending \$2.00 to \$3.00 a person a week for food. Some spent less than a dollar. Others spent \$4.00 or more.

BAKER:

And even those at the top didn't always buy what you'd call a good diet?

STIEBELING:

No, not always. Fewer than 4 out of every 10 who spend enough to buy a good diet really got it. By a good diet, of course, I mean food that supplies the minerals, vitamins, and other nutrients the body needs to keep it fit.

BAKER:

It's a question of knowing your food values then, when you go to market.

STIEBELING:

Chiefly that---and being a good cook.

BAKER:

I took the good cook for granted.

STIEBELING:

You're lucky if you can. Unfortunately our studies show that we've still got a lot to learn in this country about meal planning, and cooking so as to conserve food values---as well as about choosing food.

BAKER:

Are there some spots where we're especially weak?

STIEBELING:

Yes---two at least, and this seems to be as true of farm as of city families. We would get along better with more calcium and more Vitamin A.

BAKER:

Um---calcium---that means milk, cheese---

STIEBELING:

Yes---milk in all its forms---fresh, dried, evaporated, or made into cheese. Turnip greens are one of the richest sources of calcium among the green leaves. And mustard greens, and collards, and kale are much, much better than white cabbage and bleached lettuce.

BAKER:

And better for vitamin A and iron.

STIEBELING:

Mr. Baker, I see you know your food values.

BAKER:

Well, I've been exposed to a good deal of home economics.

STIEBELING:

Lucky again. Maybe you can suggest a way to make these ideas about diet "take" with more people. In this study of 4000 city families we found that about 16 out of every 100 were definitely short in calcium---not getting nearly enough to build good bones and teeth. For children and expectant mothers that's a particularly grave situation. And only about 20 families in 100 has a really liberal allowance of vitamin A.

BAKER:

The vitamin that protects against night blindness.

STIEBELING:

Nutritional night blindness. Some cases of night blindness come from other causes of course.

BAKER:

Yes, of course, food isn't the only thing. Well, Dr. Stiebeling, what about food habits in different parts of the country? Do you find that people choose better diets in one section than in another?

STIEBELING:

No place is perfect of course. But there are some quite striking differences. Take for instance people spending from two dollars to two and a quarter a week for food for each person in the family. (and, by the way, I'm talking only about white families. We studied the negro families in another group.) The white families in the cities of the Northeast bought more meat, fish, and poultry than similar families on the Pacific Coast or in the Southeastern States.

BAKER:

The Southern taste for fried chicken notwithstanding.

STIEBELING:

Yes, in spite of that. But when it came to milk, fruits, and practical all vegetables except potatoes the Pacific families topped everybody else.

BAKER:

Does that mean they're better fed?

STIEBELING:

They seem to be. Lots of white families in the Southeast do almost as well. They don't use so much milk and cheese. But they eat greens all the year around---turnip greens, kale, collards---

BAKER:

And follow the good old custom of dunking corn bread in the pot liquor.

STIEBELING:

That's very good dietetics. Don't you know that half the minerals and half the vitamins are in the pot liquor.

We found some very interesting things about bread in different parts of the country. In the South of course people buy more flour and corn meal and bake more of their bread at home. On the Pacific Coast they have quite a taste for whole-wheat bread. And in the North Atlantic cities when it's not white bread, it's likely to be rye. And the North Atlantic families eat over 50 per cent more macaroni than the families we studied in any other region.

BAKER:

What about potatoes?

STIEBELING:

They're popular everywhere. No matter how much or how little people spend for food, they usually buy a good many potatoes. In the North Atlantic cities the average for a person a year was 157 pounds.

BAKER:

That's good news for potato growers. In fact it seems to me this whole study of what city people eat must be as important to farmers as it is to city people.

STIEBELING:

Yes, the table of the city family is the market of the farm family.

BAKER:

And how to bring the proper balance between the two is of course one of the major problems of our time. This careful scientific study of yours, Dr. Stiebeling, at least gives us some of the facts needed to work on.

STIEBELING:

Well, you know what Dr. James McLester said before the American Medical Association a few years ago --

BAKER:

I should, but I'm afraid I don't --

STIEBELING:

He said in effect that we have now better health and longer life because of what we know about controlling disease. And if we would just take advantage of what we know about nutrition, we have the promise of still longer life and more vigorous life.

BAKER:

Well, if I can have better health and longer life by eating more wisely, that's a promise I want to cash in on. And thank you, Dr. Stiebeling, for this most interesting report. By the way, Ruth, may I repeat last week's offer of that helpful bulletin on "Diets to Fit the Family Income?" Dr. Stiebeling's one of the authors of that, I believe.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, it gives Dr. Stiebeling's plans for spending the food money so as to get the most food value for every dollar.

BAKER:

At several price levels.

VAN DEMAN:

At four price levels, yes---all the way from a liberal allowance to an emergency diet when you're down to bed rock.

BAKER:

Well, if any of our listeners would like a copy of this bulletin---Diets to Fit the Family Income, just send a card to the Bureau of Home Economics, ask for Diets to Fit the Family Income, and it will come to you free of charge.

#####

